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ABSTRACT

This document details a unique transfer agreement between the University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville (UACCB) and Lyon College, a selective liberal arts college in the region. This agreement allows students at Lyon to take courses at UACCB and students at UACCB to take courses at Lyon prior to transfer, without paying the higher fees at Lyon. In addition, Lyon agreed to give a scholarship to UACCB transfer students in order to make enrollment at the college more affordable. As a result of the program, which recently completed it fifth year, Lyon has seen an increase in transfer from UACCB, and the students who transferred have succeeded academically. As a result of the success of the program, other private institutions in the UACCB service area have also made similar articulation agreements. This document includes a discussion of the development of the transfer agreement (College Opportunity Program) and how nontraditional students can be seen as a benefit to a college like Lyon, which has previously not served this type of student. Also included are suggested "talking points" that a two-year college might consider when beginning an articulation discussion with a four-year school. (LD)

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Building Transfer Partnerships Between Private Colleges and Community Colleges: A Unique Approach That Works

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Introduction

In 1998, the local Batesville, Arkansas two-year college became a member of the University of Arkansas System of colleges and universities. The institution changed its name from Gateway Technical College to the University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville (UACCB) and sought to become a comprehensive community college. A significant part of this transition was to seek to develop excellent transfer relationships with the four public universities and three private universities located within commuting distance of the UACCB service area.

UACCB began working with Lyon College, a regionally recognized, select liberal arts college, to establish a transfer arrangement. UACCB desired a unique transfer arrangement that would offer students a chance to take classes at Lyon prior to their acceptance and transfer as well as offer guaranteed financial assistance that reduced the cost of attendance at Lyon to a level competitive with public universities in the State. At this same time, Lyon was experiencing enrollment declines and recognized the valuable resource in UACCB. The result of the collaboration is the College Opportunity Program, a unique transfer arrangement between a community college and a selective liberal arts institution.

This paper discusses the groundwork required to establish the program. This groundwork included numerous discussions, a presentation on the marginal costs versus marginal benefits of a transfer arrangement for a four-year college, and the development of an understanding that UACCB is not a "competitor" of Lyon. It also discusses the contributions non-traditional students can make to the educational diversity of a

traditional liberal arts college and recommends "talking points" for two-year colleges wishing to convince four-year schools of the value of this type of articulation.

Literature Review

Community colleges increasingly serve as the gateway to the baccalaureate degree. In 1955, 17% of students enrolled in higher education were enrolled in two-year institutions. In 1995, 47% of students enrolled in higher education were enrolled in two-year institutions (McGraw, 1999). Data also show that approximately 23% of two-year college students transfer to a four-year college or university, a trend that is on the rise (Cohen, 1993). A study by the Washington State Board for Community College Education found that 33% of the 1988 baccalaureate degree recipients had been community college students at one time (1989). A study of six public universities in Virginia found that 38% of the graduates had transferred credit from a community college (Palmer & Pugh, 1993). Because of numerous factors including the affordability of the two-year public college, the convenience/proximity of the public two-year college, the increasing receptivity of four-year schools of two-year college's coursework, legislative initiatives mandating transfer articulation, and the growing interest in the transfer function among two-year college staff, transfer rates are expected to continue to increase in the coming years.

Most persons serving in two-year college academic administrations will readily admit their frustration with the student transfer experience. Historically, four-year colleges and universities have viewed two-year colleges in a negative light, publicly stating that the quality of student learning at the two-year college is poor when compared to the university, and privately viewing the two-year school as an effective low-cost

competitor that will steal students if treated as an educational equal. Such concerns have created a difficult environment for the transfer student. This frustration is heightened by the articulation process in which the four-year college has total control of determining what courses are equivalent to the university courses and what will or will not be allowed as transfer. Students are frequently warned to "beware" of verbal agreements and to target the four-year school early and find out which courses transfer and get it in writing. "Make sure there are no surprises" was the warning in a U.S. News and World Report on easing the transition into a four-year university (McGraw, 1999).

In recent years, a general leveling off in the number of students enrolled in higher education, combined with an increasing proportion of students choosing the two-year college as their higher education starting point, has put pressure on four-year colleges to maintain enrollment and fill their lecture halls with students. This, combined with the involvement of numerous state legislatures weighing in to establish a "mandatory" common core of transfer courses among state-supported colleges and universities, has served to mitigate a portion of the four-year schools' historical resistance to transfer relationships and has created an environment conducive to more favorable articulation.

A number of researchers have identified an event they have labeled "transfer shock". The notion is that students transferring from community colleges experience an initial decline in their grade point average (GPA) during the first semester and first year of their attendance at a four-year college. The inferences drawn from the studies and the use of the word "shock" seem to exaggerate the actual study results and may simply be a further indication of the four-year schools' unwillingness to equitably value the two year college. A study by Hills (1965) concluded that transfer students should expect a decline

of 0.3 to 0.5 in their semester GPA. Such findings are consistent with other studies in the late 80's and early 90's. In more recent years, however, studies have shown a much less serious concern and indicate that the term transfer shock is an inappropriate label. Anglin (1993) found that community college transfers had a graduation rate equivalent to native students. Jones and Lee (1992) found the same. With regard to transfer to private four year schools, transfer shock appears to be even less of a concern. Miller and Katz (1977) found that transfer students had a 0.1 increase in their GPA at the end of their first year following transfer to private colleges in New Jersey. Cejda and Kaylor (1997) studied 216 transfer students transferring from a community college to one of two private liberal arts colleges. They found that, although 53% of the transfers experienced a decline in their first year GPA, 48% experienced an increase or no change. The mean decline for all transfers was 0.09, hardly grounds for the label "transfer shock". None of these studies provide information on the possible existence of "rising junior shock" that may or may not be experienced by students matriculating to their junior year of studies without transferring from a community college. Such information is critical in order to more effectively support the apparent research bias and stereotyping of transfer students.

The College Opportunity Program

In 1998, I became the new Chief Academic Officer of UACCB. As an emerging comprehensive community college, I recognized the importance of the development of favorable articulation agreements. Because of the institution's historically technical focus, and because of the reasons cited earlier regarding the four-year school mentality towards transfer, I found that the four public universities in commuting distance of our service area were not interested in executing anything more than the most basic

articulation agreements. One was unwilling to go beyond the 30 credit hour mandated transfer core required by legislative action in the State of Arkansas.

Due to the public colleges' lack of cooperative spirit, it was determined that private colleges would have to be the place of emphasis. The hope became to develop a transfer agreement that was so positive that it would change the transfer patterns of the college and start to send more students to private schools while reducing the number of transfers to the intransigent public ones. It was with this intent that conversations began with Lyon College.

Lyon is located in the same town as UACCB. Until the mid-80s Lyon served as a principal higher education access point for residents of UACCB's service area. However, in the mid-80s Lyon underwent a change in focus and sought to become a more select, regionally recognized liberal arts college. This shift provided UACCB the niche it needed to begin to serve residents of the area. By 1998, UACCB was serving as the principal higher education access point for service area residents.

In the late 90s Lyon was experiencing slight enrollment declines and was struggling with the challenge of maintaining high entrance standards and sufficient enrollment levels. The Chief Academic Officer and the President of Lyon were reasonably receptive to the idea of transfer articulation. The first two conversations dealt with the basic notion of transfer, including UACCB recommending the best and the brightest go to Lyon, and Lyon using UACCB as a place for marginal students to improve their readiness for the Lyon experience. The conversations also served to establish an understanding that UACCB was not a competitor of Lyon. By presenting UACCB demographic information, it became clear that the type of student that begins

their college career at Lyon was different from the type of student that starts at UACCB. This understanding became an important factor in Lyon's willingness to establish the College Opportunity Program. Finally, Lyon acknowledged their experience with non-traditional students had been largely favorable in the past. They found them to be highly motivated learners that quickly assumed campus roles of academic leadership. They did suggest, however, that since most of them were commuters, it was more challenging to engage them in campus life activities and experiences outside of the academic environment. Thus, Lyon officials readily accepted the idea that campus diversity is a critical component of the liberal arts education and that UACCB transfer students could play a major role in helping Lyon achieve their diversity goals.

The pace, and excitement, of the collaboration increased during the third session. At this session we discussed the establishment of an informal "bank account" whereby qualified students from UACCB can take courses at Lyon but only pay tuition at the community college rate and students from Lyon can take UACCB classes without paying anything above their full-time tuition at Lyon. After consideration of this point, Lyon identified a number of courses (primarily in math and anatomy and physiology) that its students could benefit from and UACCB identified a number of Lyon general core courses (such as foreign language, religion and western traditions) that its students could take. It was quickly agreed that a "bank account" would benefit both colleges and that potential transfer students could use the program to solidify their transfer choice and ease into the four-year college setting. It was further agreed that both schools would annually reconcile the bank account to make sure that one school wasn't benefiting disproportionately.

It was also at this third session where a pitch was made regarding the economics of transfer. Four-year colleges typically have junior and senior average class sizes that are significantly smaller than their freshman and sophomore level classes. Lyon certainly experiences this trait. The marginal cost then, of accommodating a new student at the junior level, is much less than accepting one as a freshman. Additional freshmen require new sections of packed classes; additional juniors simply fill out vacant seats in existing classes. Furthermore, the retention efforts needed for transfer students are less than for traditional ones. After all, the transfer student is college savvy and only has two or perhaps three years left to graduation. In other words, the end is in sight for students and therefore retention to graduation is more likely.

Following this discussion it was pointed out that approximately 70% of our transfer students were transferring to Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, an 80-mile drive from UACCB. The number one reason for this transfer pattern was the low cost of in-state public school tuition. It was suggested that Lyon offer transfer students an automatic scholarship that reduced the cost of attendance at Lyon to a level equivalent with ASU-Jonesboro. After careful consideration and analysis, Lyon responded with an automatic $4,000 per year scholarship to any student who maintained a 3.0 GPA, completed 45 hours of transferable course work and was formally recommended by the UACCB Chief Academic Officer. Furthermore, Lyon offered to review non-automatic qualifiers on a case-by-case basis to determine if the scholarship could be awarded to them as well. The $4,000 scholarship brings Lyon tuition in line with the total costs of attending ASU-Jonesboro. This total cost included tuition, fees, and commuting expenses associated with a daily 160-mile commute.

Upon reaching agreement on both the bank account concept and the transfer scholarship requirements it was left to name the program and role it out for public approval. Lyon recommended the name College Opportunity Program as they wished to present the program as a way for a select regional college to provide support for local applicants. UACCB concurred and the name was set. The local Chamber of Commerce sponsored a Business After Hours program at the local country club where the CEOs of both colleges provided the details of the program to attendees and the press. The degree of community support was exceptional.

Success of the Program

In the five years prior to the establishment of the College Opportunity Program a total of three students completed 45 or more credit hours at UACCB and transferred to Lyon. During the first year (1999-2000) of the program 7 students from UACCB qualified and were accepted for the scholarship. Preliminary estimates for 2000-2001 show 14 students transferring with the scholarship and another 30 plus students have expressed their intention to transfer under the program. At the same time, UACCB has experienced enrollment growth of greater than 50% over the two-year period since the program was established. While it is impossible to determine the degree to which the program has contributed to the enrollment growth, it is certainly a factor and the College is aware of a number of students who are entering UACCB with the express desire to transfer under the program at a later date.

Due to UACCB's reorientation as a comprehensive community college and its hyper-enrollment growth, the number of students transferring to four-year schools is increasing. Because of this, the number of students transferring to ASU-Jonesboro has

held steady, although the university is not attracting additional transfer students to its campus.

As a result of the success of this program, Williams Baptist College, located 60 miles away in Walnut Ridge articulated a similar automatic transfer scholarship with a stipend of approximately $3,000 per year. This program, entitled the Summit Scholar Program, was established in Fall 2000 and four students have transferred under it. Finally, a third private school has been approached and is considering a program as well.

The students who have transferred under the program appear to have matriculated without the feared "transfer shock" identified in research. Lyon reports that all of the transfers have been retained and that their academic progress is equal to that of rising juniors.

A side benefit of the program, and one that was unanticipated at its establishment, was the positive image created in both our region and statewide as a result of two very different institutions of higher education that have found common ground of significant benefit to students. The collaboration is often cited around the State as a positive example of partnering and will no doubt assist both colleges in their local development activities. In addition, the program has created a shared vision of community service between the two colleges and other collaborations are underway including partnerships to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing program through the University of Arkansas Center for Medical Sciences, and the Master of Business Administration through the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Both of these programs have been established and are being offered with the support of both colleges on UACCB's campus and utilizing faculty and/or library resources from Lyon.

Conclusion

It remains to be seen if UACCB can successfully leverage these private college articulations into stronger, more student-friendly programs with public universities. It appears clear that the number of students transferring from UACCB to private colleges is going to continue to increase, and that this increase will be to the detriment of public university enrollments. The $100,000 question remains; when will the public universities in our service area recognize UACCB as a valuable partner in their enrollment management efforts and decide to treat our students with the respect that private colleges are exhibiting.

For those who wish to establish or improve their articulation arrangements with four year schools, this program suggests the following points be emphasized:

- Begin with private colleges,
- Emphasize that the two-year college is not a competitor of the four-year college and provide demographic data in support of this,
- Emphasize student maturity and the improved retention rate of transfer students,
- Highlight the increased campus diversity as a result of transfer students and the positive impact this will have for a liberal arts college,
- Emphasize that the marginal cost for a junior-level transfer is much less than for an entering freshman,

- Be assertive about the need for scholarship support that makes a private college financially competitive with public colleges,
- Search out other opportunities for partnerships that will further strengthen the relationships between the two colleges,
- Celebrate the successful development of a transfer program and develop community awareness and interest in its value,
- And finally, use the program as leverage to establish such relationships with other colleges and universities.

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